

BOOK REVIEWS

Fiji's Natural Heritage

Paddy Ryan

Exile Publishing, New Zealand, 2000

ISBN 0-908988-14-1 Hardcover, oversize

Review by Paul Geraghty, University of the South Pacific, Suva

For those who are familiar with the relatively impoverished fauna and flora of Rapa Nui, or even that of any other part of Polynesia, this book focusing on the natural heritage of Polynesia's closest neighbor will be an eye-opener. With thousands of species of plants and fish, over a hundred species of birds, six species of bats, two species of land snake, and so on, Fiji offers a veritable Garden of Eden compared to the more easterly isles of the Pacific.

This is a greatly enlarged and enhanced revision of a work that was first published, in paperback, in 1988. More than 400 more color photographs have been added, and the result is a stunning high quality 288-page publication in hardback. All of the photographs are well chosen, and some are simply superb. Its scope is enormous, with an introductory section setting the historical and geographical scene followed by chapters on coral, worms, mollusks, echinoderms, crustaceans, insects, fish, amphibians, reptiles, birds, mammals, plants, the Fijians, and places to visit. Finally there is a short glossary of biological and other scientific terms, an extensive bibliography, and a very helpful and comprehensive index.

The author lived in Fiji for many years, lecturing in biology at the University of the South Pacific, roaming the islands with notebook and camera, and earning himself a reputation by writing a popular weekly nature column in the *Fiji Times*. The informative but relaxed style he honed during those days is peppered with anecdotes from his ramblings through the Fijian bush, and makes this book a delight to read.



Ryan is a keen observer of the interaction between mankind and the natural world, and there is much here that is of ethnographic interest (including many Fijian names for natural species that are not listed in the dictionaries). Nevertheless, he is no subscriber to the idea that the original inhabitants of Fiji or the Pacific were 'at one with nature'. He takes pains to point out that many animals, in particular flightless birds but also crocodiles and iguanas, were exterminated by the first human colonizers of Fiji. Rapanuiphiles will find much to ponder on here.

An unusual, perhaps even unique, feature of this book is that it will also be published in Fijian translation, in order to help convey not only the author's love of the subject, but also his conservation message, to the indigenous Fijians, who constitute over 50% of the population of Fiji, and own approximately 83% of the land. The publishers should be applauded for taking this initiative, which will encourage the indigenous Fijian people to be better informed, and to play a more positive role in the maintenance of Fiji's fragile environment. Publication of the Fijian version is being funded by the California-based environmental protection organization Seacology as part of its continuing efforts to preserve island cultures and habitats.

Drawbacks are few. I've spotted just a handful of typos, none of which is of any consequence; and of course in a work of this sort there will always be those who feel their particular neck of the woods is hard done by. If you're a fish fanatic, for instance, you may feel that 26 pages is simply not enough. The glossary also could do with expansion, since it lacks quite a few of the technical terms that are used in the text.

For anyone with an interest in the natural history of the region, this landmark work on the islands at the gateway to Polynesia is indispensable. There is simply nothing to compare with it for any other island group in the South Pacific outside of New Zealand. I can only concur with Sir David Attenborough's remarks in an earlier review, that this book is a "superb and – more importantly – comprehensive survey of all aspects of the rich natural world of Fiji.. the sort of guide that anyone with curiosity about the land, the plants and the animals around them is constantly seeking... a book that will, I am sure, be constantly consulted and treasured."

The book is available from: Exile Publishing, P. O. Box 8077, Auckland, New Zealand; e-mail: mail@exile.co.nz ; Pacific Island Books, 2802 E. 132nd Circle, Thornton, CO 80241-2003; www.pacificislandbooks.com

On the Road of the Winds: An Archaeological History of the Pacific Islands before European Contact

Patrick Vinton Kirch

The University of California Press, 2000 \$45 hardcover.

ISBN 0-520-22347-0.

Reviewed by Peter R. Mills, University of Hawai'i, Hilo.

Patrick Kirch's *On the Road of the Winds* is an essential new synthesis of Oceanic prehistory – something that has not been attempted on such a comprehensive scale since Peter Bellwood's *Man's Conquest of the Pacific* (1978). Through an introduction and nine subsequent chapters, Kirch draws from an